

Spanish Dermatological Vocabulary Used by Mexican Workers

By: Quirina M Vallejos MPH, Antonio J Marin MA, Steven R Feldman MD PhD, Jennifer Krejci-Manwaring MD, Alan Fleischer MD, Sara A Quandt PhD, [Mark Schulz PhD](#), Gerell Smith BS, Stephen R Rapp PhD, and Thomas A Arcury PhD

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Abstract:

Spanish is the second most common language spoken in the United States. Physicians can expect a growing population of patients who speak Spanish as their primary language. The purpose of this study was to develop a glossary of Spanish dermatological vocabulary commonly used by Mexican workers. Dermatologic terms were gathered from transcripts of in-depth interviews with 31 Latino farmworkers in North Carolina. Participants were asked to name and define words related to skin irritations. Farmworkers provided several definitions of some terms, and several Spanish equivalents exist for specific English words. This glossary is a supplement to other resources for learning medical Spanish and expands health care professionals' knowledge of dermatology-related Spanish vocabulary.

Article:

Introduction

Spanish is the second most common language spoken in the United States. Over 28 million people reported speaking Spanish in the 2000 Census, while the number of people who reported speaking languages other than Spanish or English totaled only 19 million [1]. Based on data from the 2002 National Center for Health Statistics' National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey [2], we estimate that there were 68 million visits of Hispanic or Latino patients to office-based U.S. physicians. In 2004, 61.4% of employed Hispanics/Latinos in the U.S. worked in agriculture, manufacturing, construction and service industries [3]. Workers in these industries are routinely exposed to risk factors for a variety of skin diseases [4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13]. As more Latino workers are affected by skin problems, it will become more common for physicians to have patients with dermatological complaints who speak Spanish as their primary language.

Physicians have implemented strategies for improving communication with their Spanish-speaking patients. Nearly 40 years ago, Martinez [14] provided a standard interview that physicians who knew very little or no Spanish could use to obtain a history from their patients. Recently, in addition to utilizing trained bilingual interpreters, more physicians and other health care providers have begun to learn Spanish. The purpose of this paper is to enhance the capacity of health care professionals to communicate with their Spanish-speaking clients by providing an expanded glossary of Spanish words that are commonly used by people from Mexico to name and describe signs, symptoms and treatment of skin diseases.

The focus on terms commonly used in Mexico is a strength of this study in light of the size and rapid growth rate of the Mexican-born population in the United States. Mexicans in the U.S. numbered over 11 million in 2004, and they currently make up 32% of the foreign-born population [15]. In addition, the average annual growth rate of the Mexican population in the U.S. has held steady at 8% for more than three decades [15]. Regional variations in the dialect of Spanish that people speak exist both between and within countries in the Americas and the Caribbean [16,17] While people from different regions are able to converse freely with one another, regional differences in Spanish can result in specific words that are used in some regions but not

others. With the growth in the number of Mexican workers in the U.S., it is useful to consider the specific words this population uses.

Methods

The terms that are listed in this paper were collected from a set of 31 in-depth interviews about occupational skin disease that were conducted with Latino farmworkers in North Carolina. One purpose of the in-depth interviews was to elicit common terms used to refer to skin irritations. When interviewers heard new words or heard familiar words used in a new way, respondents were asked to define and differentiate the terms. All participants were from Mexico and spoke Spanish fluently. Three participants spoke the indigenous languages Mixteco and Tarasco and spoke Spanish as a second language. Interviews were conducted in Spanish by trained bilingual interviewers fluent in Spanish. All interviews were tape recorded and were then transcribed verbatim and translated by a professional translator. Translated transcripts were reviewed for accuracy by the interviewer. In the English versions of the transcripts, Spanish dermatology-related words were left in parentheses next to their English equivalents. Members of the research team read the transcripts and highlighted important dermatological terms. The highlighted terms were compiled to create a glossary of common dermatological terms.

Results

Below is a glossary of Spanish words with their English equivalents. Parts of speech (noun, verb or adjective) are indicated. The glossary is organized into the following categories: skin-related anatomy, signs and symptoms of skin disease, terms used to describe skin irritations, names of specific skin conditions, and treatment-related terms. The last section in the glossary is a list of English words for which three or more Spanish equivalents were used in the interviews. ([PDF version for printing](#))

Skin-related Anatomy

capa, la (de la piel)
(n.)= layer (of skin)
cutis, el
(n.)= skin
piel, la
(n.)= skin
pliegue, el (de la piel)
(n.)= fold (of skin)
poro, el
(n.)= pore
raíz, la
(del pelo) (n.)= root (of hair)

Signs and Symptoms of Skin Disease

abertura, la
(n.)= cut or crack
abierto
(adj.)= cracked open
abrirse
(v.)= to break open or to crack
agrietado
(adj.)= cracked
agrietarse
(v.)= to crack
agua/aguita, el
(n.)= clear liquid that oozes from a skin irritation, serous liquid
ampolla, la

(n.)= blister

ámpula, la

(n.)= sore or blister (The definition of ccmpula varies by region in Mexico.)

arder

(v.)= to have a burning sensation

ardor/ardorcito, el

(n.)= burning sensation

arruga, la

(n.)= wrinkle

barro/barrito, el

(n.)= pimple, pustule

blanda

(adj.)= tender

bola/bolita, la

(n.)= bump or blister

bolota/borota, la

(n.)= blister

bolsita, la

(n.)= blister

bomba, la

(n.)= blister

caerse el cuero/cuerito

(v.)= to peel

caerse el pellejito

(v.)= to peel

caída del cabello, la

(n.)= hair loss

caída del pelo, la

(n.)= hair loss

calvicie, la

(n.)= baldness

calvo

(adj.)= bald

cambio de color de las uñas, el

= nail change

carrapelar

(v.)= to peel

carne viva, la

(n.)= raw flesh

caspa, la

(n.)= dandruff

cicatriz, la

(n.)= scar

clacote, el

(n.)= large pus bump

colorada

(adj.)= red

comer

(v.)= to itch

comezón, la

(n.)= itchiness

cortada/cortadita, la

(n.)= cut
cortadura, la
(n.)= cut
costra, la
(n.)= scab
costroso/costrudo
(adj.)= scabby or crusty
cuartear
(v.)= to crack
descamación, la
(n.)= peeling
despellejarse
(v.)= to peel
desprenderse
(v.)= to flake off
enrojecimiento, el
(n.)= redness
erupción, la
(n.)= pustule
escaldarse
(v.)= to chafe
escama, la
(n.)= flakes or scale
escamación, la
(n.)= flakiness or scaliness
escozor, el
(n.)= itchiness or burning
espesamiento/espesor, el
(n.)= thickening
espinilla, la
(n.)= pustule, pimple
globo, el
(n.)= blister
granos/granitos, los
(n.)= bumps, pustules
grano enterrado, el
(n.)= large pus bump
grieta, la
(n.)= crack
hacerse alta
(v.)= to swell
hacerse cortaditas
(v.)= to cut oneself
hendidura, la
(n.)= crack
herida, la
(n.)= wound
hinchado
(adj.)= swollen
hincharse
(v.)= to swell
hormigueo, el

(n.)= itchininess
hoyo, el
(n.)= pockmark
infección, la
(n.)= infection
inflamado
(adj.)= swollen
inflamarse
(v.)= to swell
irritación, la
(n.)= irritation
levantarse los pellejitos
(v.)= to peel
lunar, el
(n.)= mole or birthmark
llaga, la
(n.)= sore or blister
machucón, el
(n.)= bruise
marcado
(adj.)= marked
(by pigment change), scarred
mancha blanca, la
(n.)= light spot, hypopigmentation
mancha oscura, la
(n.)= dark spot, hyperpigmentation
mancha roja, la
(n.)= red spot, hives
mordedura, la
(n.)= bite
moretón, el
(n.)= bruise
nacido, el
(n.)= large pus bump
parche, el
(n.)= patch
partido
(adj.)= cracked
partidura, la
(n.)= cut
partirse
(v.)= to crack
pelarse
(v.)= to peel
pérdida de pigmentación, la
(n.)= loss of pigmentation
perilla, la
(n.)= sty
picadura, la
(n.)= sting
(from insect)
picarse

(v.)= to itch

picazón, la

(n.)= itchiness

piel de lagarto, la

(n.)= a term used in some regions of Mexico to refer to thickened skin, means lizard skin

plasta de granos, la

(n.)= dense patch of bumps

puntito, el

(n.)= small bump, the head of a pustule

pus, el

(n.)= pus

quemarse

(v.)= to burn oneself

quemazón, el

(n.)= burning sensation

raja, la

(n.)= crack

rajadura, la

(n.)= cut

rajar

(v.)= to crack

rasgar

(v.)= to cut

rasgo, el

(n.)= cut

rasguño, el

(n.)= scratch

raspadura, la

(n.)= scratch or scrape

raspar

(v.)= to scratch or scrape

raspón, el

(n.)= scratch

rasquera, la

(n.)= itchiness

re seca

(adj.)= dry

resequedad, la

(n.)= dryness

roletito, el

(n.)= row

(of bumps or blisters)

ronchas/ronchitas, las

(n.)= bumps, hives, a rash consisting of large swollen bumps

roña/roñita, la

(n.)= bump, rash, or scab

rosada

(adj.)= pink

rotura, la

(n.)= cut or crack

rozadura, la

(n.)= chafing or mild abrasions

rozarse

(v.)= to chafe

salpullido/sarpullido, el

(n.)= rash consisting of many small bumps

sarna, la

(n.)= rash

(in medical Spanish, refers to scabies, but some laypersons use the term to refer to rashes in general)

sensible

(adj.)= tender

tiesa

(adj.)= thick

torta de granos, la

(n.)= dense patch of bumps

vejiga/vejiguilla, la

(n.)= blister

Vivo

(adj.)= raw

(top layer of epidermis has been scratched away)

Terms Used to Describe Skin Irritations

adistanciadas

(adj.)= spaced far apart

aliviarse

(v.)= to get better, to heal

apagarse

(v.)= to heal, to go away

áspera

(adj.)= rough

bajarse

(v.)= to go down (swelling)

borrarse

(v.)= to heal, to go away

brotar

(v.)= to erupt, to appear (the beginnings of a skin symptom)

cerrado

(adj.)= healed

cerrar

(v.)= to heal (a sore or open wound)

cicatrizado

(adj.)= healed or scarred

cicatrizar

(v.)= to heal

componerse

(v.)= to get better, to heal

contadas

(adj.)= few (a description of the number of bumps a person has)

contagiar

(v.)= to spread a disease to another person

contagiarse

(v.)= to contract an infectious disease

controlarse

(v.)= to decrease in severity, to heal

curarse

(v.)= to heal, to be cured

cutánea

(adj.)= cutaneous

chiquilla/chiquita

(adj.)= small

durar

(v.)= to last (as in length of duration)

enconarse

(v.)= to become infected

enronchado

(adj.)= broken out in a rash

enroñarse

(v.)= to break out in a rash or bumps

escamosa

(adj.)= flaky or scaly

exprimir

(v.)= to burst

(a pustule or vesicle) by squeezing

extripar

(v.)= to burst

(a pustule or vesicle)

fuerte

(adj.)= severe

grande

(adj.)= large

grave

(adj.)= severe, serious

infectada

(adj.)= infected

infectarse

(v.)= to contract an infectious disease

ir bajando

(v.)= to spread to deeper layers of the epidermis or dermis

ir corcomiendo

(v.)= to spread (to cover a larger area of skin)

ir extendiendose

(v.)= to spread (to cover a larger area of skin)

ir más adentro

(v.)= to spread to deeper layers of the epidermis or dermis

ir profundizando

(v.)= to spread to deeper layers of the epidermis or dermis

ir sumiendo

(v.)= to spread to deeper layers of the epidermis or dermis

juntas/juntos

(adj.)= close together (describes spacing of bumps)

leve

(adj.)= mild

muy mal

(adj.)= very bad, severe

parejo/parejito

(adj.)= dense (describes spacing of bumps)

pequeño

(adj.)= small

permanecer

(v.)= to last

(as in length of duration)

pocos

(adj.)= few (a description of the number of bumps a person has)

marcado

(adj.)= scarred, permanently marked (color change)

quemarse

(v.)= to heal, to go away

quitarse

(v.)= to heal, to go away

rasposa

(adj.)= rough

rebrotar

(v.)= to recur or reemerge

regarse

(v.)= to spread (to cover a larger area of skin)

relleno

(adj.)= covered over a large area (by a skin problem)

retirarse

(v.)= to heal, to go away

reventarse

(v.)= to break open (as in a blister)

rojo

(adj.)= red

salir

(v.)= to begin, to come out, to appear (beginning of a skin symptom)

secarse

(v.)= to heal

separados

(adj.)= widely or sparsely spaced

tupida/tupidita

(adj.)= dense, closely spaced (used to describe spacing of bumps)

uno que otro en medio

(adj.)= widely or sparsely spaced

volver a brotar

(v.)= to recur

volver a resaltar

(v.)= to recur

Names of Specific Skin Conditions

acné, el

(n.)= acne

callo, el

(n.)= callus

cancer de la piel, el

(n.)= skin cancer

empeine

(n.)= impetigo (Empeine is also used to refer to round scaly patches consistent with tinea corporis.)

hiedra, la/granos de la hiedra

(n.)= poison ivy
hongos, los
(n.)= any type of fungal infection
mal de pinto, el
(n.)= hypopigmentation or vitiligo
mezquino, el
(n.)= wart
padraastro, el
(n.)= hang nail
pañó, el
(n.)= dark spot, hyperpigmentation, often on the face
pie de atleta, el
(n.)= athlete's foot
quemada del sol, la
(n.)= sunburn
quemadura, la
(n.)= burn
quemeroncho, el
(n.)= heat rash
rubeola, la
(n.)= rubella
sarampión, el
(n.)= measles
sudamina, la
(n.)= heat rash/miliaria
tiña, la
(n.)= hypopigmentation (consistent with tinea versicolor)
uña enterrada, la
(n.)= ingrown toenail
uñero, el
(n.)= ingrown toenail
varicela, la
(n.)= chicken pox/varicela
verruqa, la
(n.)= wart

Treatment-related Terms

crema, la
(n.)= cream
curar
(v.)= to cure
loción, la
(n.)= lotion
medicina, la
(n.)= medicine (oral)
mercurio, el
(n.)= iodine
pastilla, la
(n.)= pill
pellizcar
(v.)= to burst (a pustule or vesicle)
pomada, la

(n.)= cream

rascarse

(v.)= to scratch an itch

receta, la

(n.)= prescription

recetar

(v.)= to prescribe

remedio casero, el

(n.)= home remedy

tratamiento, el

(n.)= treatment

tratar

(v.)= to treat

unguento, el

(n.)= ointment

untar

(v.)= to apply (a cream or ointment)

English words with three or more Spanish equivalents

bumps

(n.)= bolitas, granos/granitos, puntitos, ronchas/ronchitas, roñas/roñitas

burst (a blister)

(v.)= exprimir, extripar, pellizcar, reventar

crack, fissure

(n.)= abertura, cortadita, grieta, hendidura, raja, rotura

crack

(v.)= abrirse, agrietarse, cuartear, hacerse cortaditas, partirse, rajar

cracked

(adj.)= agrietado, partido, abierto

cut

(n.)= abertura, cortada, cortadura, partidura, rajadura, rasgo

heal/go away/get better

(v.)= acabarse, aliviarse, apagarse, borrarse, cerrar, cicatrizar, componerse, controlarse, curarse, desbaratarse, perderse, quemarse, quitarse, retirarse

itchiness

(n.)= comezón, escozor, hormigueo, pica pica, picazón, rascadera, rasquera

light spot, hypopigmentation

(n.)= jiricua, mal de pinto, mancha blanca, pérdida de pigmentación, pinto

path, band or row (of bumps)

(n.)= brecha, camino, roletito, venda, veredita, zurquito

peel

(v.)= caer el pellejito, caerse el cuero/cuerito, carrapelar, despellejarse, levantarse los pellejitos, pelarse

pimples, pustules

(n.)= acné, barros/barritos, espinillas, granos

pus bump

(n.)= clacote, grano con pus, grano enterrado, nacido

rash (consisting of small bumps)

(n.)= salpullido, sarpullido, sarna

rash (consisting of large swollen bumps), hives

(n.)= ronchas/ronchitas, roñitas

return/recur (a skin condition)

(v.)= rebrotar, volver a brotar, volver a resaltar

scrape, scratch

(n.)= rasguño, raspadura/raspadurita, raspón

spaced far apart

(adj.)= adistanciadas, separados, uno que esto, uno que otro en medio

spread to cover larger area of skin

(v.)= correrse, ir corcomiendo, ir extendiéndose, mancharse, regarse

spread to deeper layers of dermis

(v.)= ir bajando, ir más adentro, ir profundizando, ir sumiendo

swell

(v.)= hacerse alta, hincharse, inflamarse, ir inflamando

vesicle, blister

(n.)= ampolla, bola/bolita, bolsita, bolota/borota, bomba, botita de agua, globo, grano transparente, llaga, vejiga, vejiguilla/vejiguita

Conclusions

The vocabulary from the present study adds to the limited existing literature on dermatological Spanish [14]. Some of the definitions listed in this glossary may differ from those encountered in a common dictionary; this is because we have listed terms as they were defined by the informants with whom we spoke. While many of the terms in the glossary are used in most Spanish-speaking countries, it also includes terms that are specific to Mexico or certain regions of Mexico.

Although all of our interview participants spoke Spanish and were of Mexican origin, they did not all use the same terminology when referring to or discussing skin disease. For example, the words ronchas, salpullidos/sarpullidos, sarna and roñas all refer to a rash. Some people distinguish between the various terms based on the size and spacing of the bumps that make up the rash; others make no distinction. One person may explain that ronchas refers to a group of large swollen bumps that are sparsely spaced and salpullidos/sarpullidos refers to small bumps that are densely spaced whereas another person will explain that there is no difference between ronchas and salpullidos/sarpullidos. It is not uncommon for people to have conflicting beliefs about the differences between nearly equivalent terms. It may, therefore, be necessary to ask patients for further explanation of a term in order to learn how they define the word. Health care professionals should be prepared to use more than one equivalent term when taking a patient history and should expect to occasionally hear new terms to name a concept for which they already know one or more Spanish equivalents.

Limitations

The glossary in this paper is not a complete or exhaustive list of dermatological Spanish vocabulary. The list is limited to the terms that were extracted from interviews with 31 Latino farmworkers in North Carolina. It is likely that additional common dermatological terms or equivalents to the terms listed exist that were not elicited during these interviews. Other sources such as dictionaries and textbooks may include additional terms. Although many of the terms listed are used in Spanish-speaking countries other than Mexico, a number of the terms are probably specific to Mexico. Some of the terms may be used only in specific regions of Mexico. For example, several participants described a pus bump that must be squeezed to remove the "root" in order for the bump to heal. Most people used the name nacido for such a bump, but several people called it a clacote. These words are examples of terms that differ between the Spanish dialects that exist in Mexico. Spanish-speaking people from other regions of Mexico or other nations may have never heard certain words from this glossary or may define the words differently from the way in which they are defined here. Despite these limitations, this glossary will assist those who are interested in dermatological Spanish terminology in expanding their vocabulary.

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